**Home Service Sheet 14th May 2023**

**Call To Worship                 Psalm 66:1-4**

Shout for joy to God, all the earth;
    sing the glory of his name;
    give to him glorious praise!
Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!
    So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.
All the earth worships you
    and sings praises to you;
    they sing praises to your name.”

**Opening Prayer**

Gracious God and Father, we bring You our praise and glory today. You have done such great and marvellous deeds for Your people, about which we hear in Your Word and through the history of Your Church. Using ordinary men and women You built Your Church, and through the power of Your Holy Spirit the Gospel was proclaimed boldly and clearly so that many came to faith in You. Even in our day, O Lord, You are still at work in Your Church and the world, and we thank You for that. Keep our eyes fixed on You, and May our lips be used in Your service and to Your praise. We ask this now in Jesus’ Name, amen.

**Hymn                                     Holy, holy, holy**by ***Reginald Heber***

<https://youtu.be/vBjM47zICos>

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore Thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;

Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee, which wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide Thee, though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;

Only Thou art holy − there is none beside Thee, perfect in pow’r, in love and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea;

Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.

**Bible Reading                     Acts 17:22-34**

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,for

‘In him we live and move and have our being’;

as even some of your own poets have said,

‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

**Reflection**

Some of the last words our risen Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples here on earth are recorded for us at the end of Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them inthe name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20) To make disciples (learners, followers) of Jesus involves proclaiming the Gospel message and teaching the Scriptures, and this is a task that is to be shared by all of us who follow Jesus. It begs the important question of how do we communicate this Gospel message to people.

Our Bible reading today, from the book of Acts, gives us one example of how the apostle Paul spoke about Jesus with some people in the Greek capital, Athens. Perhaps there are some helpful and practical pointers for us that we can pick up and make use of in our own conversations with those who do not know Jesus. Athens, by the First Century AD was a multicultural city, ruled by the Romans and mainly inhabited by pagans. In other words, most folk in Athens would have believed in a whole range of different ‘gods’, from the classical Greek deities of Zeus and Hera, to the Roman imperial cult that considered the living emperor to be divine, and many more besides.

We could perhaps say that the world in which we live today is quite similar. We have people of many different faiths, and none. Some believe in many different ‘gods’, or aspects of the divine, whereas others believe in just one false ‘god’. What they all have in common is that belief in them, or devotion to them, will not bring people to eternal life. Salvation is found through faith alone in Christ alone. As the Scriptures say, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14) The Gospel needs to be preached, or proclaimed to those who do not yet know the Lord, and we must do that.

In our Bible reading we will note that Paul begins with the existing beliefs and experience of the people to whom he was preaching. He recognised their religious devotion, even though it was to false ‘gods’, and even draws their attention to one ‘unknown god’, to whom there was an altar and inscription in Athens. We could perhaps say that it is therefore useful to know some things about the beliefs and culture of the people around us. For example, a number of us have Muslim neighbours, and in order for us to speak with them about the Gospel effectively we need to know a bit about their faith. That’s not to say we all need to become experts in Islam, but rather it would be helpful to know the main differences of belief about God, Jesus and the Scriptures.

However, Paul doesn’t simply show the Athenians what was wrong with their beliefs, although he does do that. He rather goes on to proclaim the truth about the One, true and living God who created the heavens and the Earth and everything in them. Paul makes it clear that he is speaking about the only God who is worthy of worship and devotion, and the proper human response to Him is repentance for sin. We cannot speak of the love of God without speaking of human beings’ sin, for *all* have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). It is because of sin that Jesus had to come into this world to die in our place, paying the price for our sin. The sin problem must be put right in order for someone to enter into eternal life with God.

The final paragraph of our reading shows the mixed range of responses to Paul preaching the Gospel, and this is typical of the responses people may have to the Gospel message when we tell them about it. Some will make fun of us and the message of Jesus we bring. Our responsibility is to faithfully tell the Gospel message, but we are not responsible for how people respond to it – that is entirely down to the Holy Spirit of God. Others may be intrigued, but still unsure. For some this could be an excuse to not submit to Jesus, whereas for others this may be the start of a journey towards faith in Christ. Others will respond joyfully to the message of the cross with saving faith. Above all, though, we need to share the Gospel with others. Amen!

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the example of the apostle Paul who spent his life teaching the good news so that men and women would hear the truth of the Gospel and be saved. Give us hearts that care for the lost and help us to meet people at their point of need. May You help us to present the Gospel to them clearly and without hesitation, with love and compassion. Raise up more men and women who will share the good news of the Gospel in every nation and city so that many will hear and believe that Jesus died for their sins, that He rose again, and that by faith in Him, their sins are forgiven and eternal life is theirs. This we ask through Christ, our Lord, amen.

**Benediction**

Heavenly Father, thank You that You are our God and Saviour. Lord, without You we can do nothing, for in You we live, and move, and have our being. Use our lives to glorify You, and thank You for sending the Lord Jesus to suffer and die so that we might live. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.